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THE PRAGMATIC TEST OF CHRISTIANITY

In the January number of the *Atlantic Monthly* Winston Churchill, the American, writing under the title "Modern Government and Christianity," relates an interesting personal experience. Brought up under Christian influence, but having Christianity presented to him in the oriental imagery which, however forcible its appeal to the men of the first century, makes little appeal to Americans of the present day, he assumed and long maintained an attitude of indifference to the Christian religion. Going into politics, engaging actively in the fight for good government, it became gradually clear to him that the questions in which he was interested were moral questions, and that the battle he was fighting was a moral battle. The real question at issue was whether individualism should prevail in the affairs of cities, states, and the nation, and men of power use their power to advance their own selfish interests, or the government be administered with a view to the welfare of all the people, and the officers of government account themselves the servants of all. Surprised, apparently, to find himself fighting a battle which was at bottom purely moral, reflecting on this and the further fact that those whom he found himself opposing also recognized the moral character of the struggle and resented the intrusion of morals into politics, Mr. Churchill was led to study historically the question of the source of the moral enthusiasm and idealism of which he found himself and others partakers. The result of the study was the discovery that it was the principles of Christianity that he and his companions had adopted, and that the ideals which were impelling them to efforts after good government and the welfare of the people were those of Jesus. Moral enthusiasm, he discovered, had its source in religion, and that the religion of Jesus. Incidentally his historic studies led him to the conviction that throughout the Christian centuries, and notably in the Middle Ages, the simple, fundamental elements of the religion of Jesus had been clothed in, and to a certain extent obscured by, the current notions of cosmogony and of government; and that the process of liberating the gospel from the obscuring and hindering armor, which began with the Reformation, is even now making more rapid progress than ever before. This process of liberation he was

led to ascribe in part to the influence of that same historical study which had enlightened him, but even more to the constant working of the Spirit of God, which is the spirit of Jesus, in the hearts of men, to many of whom the discovery that the principles which they have been led to adopt are those of Christianity comes as a surprise after they have enthusiastically adopted them. Mr. Churchill comes to the conclusion that we stand on the threshold of a greater religious era than the world has ever seen, and that the distinguishing mark of it will be the prevalence in all phases of human life of the essential spirit and principles of the religion of Jesus.

In the autumn and winter of 1910-11 Edward A. Ross, professor of sociology in the University of Wisconsin, spent some six months in China studying that interesting country from a sociological point of view. He not only visited the coast cities, but penetrated far into the interior and observed the people in regions little affected by foreign influence. Professor Ross began his studies with no prejudice in favor of Christian missions, but with the intention of seeing things as they are. From his volume, *The Changing Chinese*, we learn that he found much to admire in the Chinese character, and much to lament in their social customs and economic conditions. He ascribes the evils from which China is suffering mainly to an unfortunate emphasis in their idea of the relations between parents and children, and an erroneous conception of the proper place of women in human society. Among the influences which are making for the alleviation of these conditions and for the promotion of Chinese welfare he expressly attaches great importance to the work of Christian missionaries, and by implication, rather than by direct statement, to the educational influence of modern science. Among the Christian missionaries the representatives of the Young Men's Christian Association especially commended themselves to him because of the practical type of Christianity which they represent, and the emphasis of their work on the doing of good after the manner and in the spirit of Christ, rather than on any specific aspect of Christian doctrine. Since his return to this country Professor Ross is reported as saying to companies of students that the work of the Association in the Far East offers them a career of unsurpassed attractiveness.

The utterances of these two representative men are, we believe, themselves representative of certain tendencies of thought in our day which are among the hopeful signs of the times. The first of these is the tendency to apply to Christianity the test of pragmatism, broadly conceived. Of narrow pragmatism we have always had too much. Many a man has justified himself in an attitude of indifference to Christianity and of alienation from the church, or even of active hostility to both, because of the unworthy life of some conspicuous representative of the church, or because of the recoil of his mind from some doctrine emphasized by the Christian body with which he has come into closest contact, or because of the slowness of the church to accept the results of scientific study and modify its attitude by them. It is good to see signs of the approach of the day when men will test Christianity by its works as they are disclosed in a survey of its history from the days of Jesus to the present, and by its effect upon the life of men broadly viewed.

The second tendency which we have in mind is the growing recognition of the essential kinship and kindred influence of Christianity and science, properly so defined. It is not long ago that they viewed one another as foes. And the typical representatives of each were to a certain extent foes. The current type of Christianity and the current type of scientific thought were really opposed to one another. But with a better understanding of the true spirit of Christianity as represented in its Founder, and a clearer definition of the idea of science, this antagonism is giving place to a recognition of the essential kinship of the two. The spirit of Jesus is intellectually the spirit of science—the purpose to see things as they are, not simply as they have been supposed and alleged to be. When the Christian is ready to take Jesus' point of view in this respect, he loses all ground of antagonism to the true spirit of science. Men of science are on the other hand coming to see that while the eagerness to know is distinguishable in thought from the zeal to place that knowledge at the service of men, and while the proportion of the two elements may rightly vary in different minds and in the same mind at different times, yet the two are never rightly separated. Either alone produces an ill-balanced, abnormal mind.

Deep in the religion of Jesus is the eagerness and readiness to know. Intertwined with the eagerness to know there is in every normal mind the sense of obligation and the desire not to hoard, but to give out for the benefit of others. Christianity and science are essentially akin.

The third tendency is to recognize with increasing clearness that moral enthusiasm and effectiveness have their normal and constant source in religion. The battle has been fought out on the field of scholarship, as the student of scientific ethics knows. The test has been made in the field of experimental ethics, and a leading representative of the ethical culture movement said not long ago that the weakness of that movement lay in its failure to give adequate recognition to religion. The test is always in progress in the field of human experience. Mr. Churchill expressly, and Mr. Ross by implication, bear this testimony, that Christianity provides the soil in which moral power and moral enthusiasm find their best rootage. The men whom Mr. Ross found exerting the most effective influence for the development of China were in China in obedience to the call of religious motives. Mr. Churchill and some of the men whom he observed became soldiers in a moral battle without being consciously impelled by religious motives. But they had grown up in the atmosphere of Christianity. And when Mr. Churchill began to look into the history of the movement of which he was himself a part he found that historically its roots and its strength were in the Christian religion.

These, we repeat, are encouraging signs of the times. When Christianity is tried by its fruits broadly judged, when its essential kinship with that great movement in the direction of scientific thought which is characteristic of our age is recognized, when it is becoming clearer to those who look into current movements and the history of the past, that the unfailing springs of moral character and moral enthusiasm are in the religion of Jesus, there is reason to take courage and be glad.